

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY IN MAIMONIDES, AVERROES, AND AQUINAS

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ABSTRACT

On the problem of religion and philosophy, there are a number of points in common among Maimonides, Averroes, and Aquinas. They all attempt to incorporate Aristotelian philosophy into their respective religious framework and thus link faith closely to reason, to the rational justification offered by philosophy. Nevertheless, on the precise relationship between religion and philosophy, between faith and reason, Maimonides differs significantly from both Averroes and Aquinas. His approach is shown to be less rational than that of Averroes and yet more rational than that of Aquinas. Maimonides' approach is distinctive among his medieval counterparts and of interest to the contemporary debate concerning religion and science.

A central problem throughout medieval thought is that of the relationship between religion and philosophy. Alternative formulations see the problem as a conflict between faith and reason, tradition and speculation, mysticism and rationalism—or, to mention its twentieth-century version, as a conflict between religion and science.¹ I wish to elucidate

¹ For a brief, introductory outline of medieval positions see Etienne Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954). For a discussion in its Islamic context see A. J. Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957). For more detailed textual discussions see, for instance, Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), 1:143-63; and his *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, vol. I: *Faith, Trinity, Incarnation*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 1-140. For an informative overview of the problem among later thinkers see Donald A. Wells, *God, Man, and the Thinker: Philosophies of Religion* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1962), 194-225; and also Brand Blanshard, *Reason and Belief* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974). For a discussion of related issues in its twentieth century context see, for instance, Ian G. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966); A. R. Peacocke, ed., *The Sciences and Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Derek Stanesby, *Science, Reason and Religion* (London: Croom Helm, 1985); and Fraser Watts, ed., *Science Meets Faith* (London: SPCK, 1998).

the approach of Maimonides (1135-1204). It is, I believe, distinctive among medieval thinkers and instructive for the contemporary debate.

Among medieval thinkers the problem arose as a result of recognizing two sources of truth: by way of revelation, which was deemed to be expressive of divine wisdom and thus foundational to religion, and by way of rational speculation, which was taken to be indicative of human wisdom and central to philosophy. Each source was held to be equally authoritative yet led to apparently incompatible claims. A prominent example is the controversy over the eternity of the world on the basis of philosophic argumentation versus the creation of the world on the basis of scriptural authority.²

Contemporary discussions tend to see the problem as one of epistemic justification. From the point of view of science, it is argued that religious claims lack the empirical justification of scientific truths. From the point of view of religion, it is countered that some claims—religious beliefs among them—do not need the justification of empirical evidence.³

I propose to clarify the approach of Maimonides by comparing his views on religion and philosophy with those of Averroes (1126-1198) and Aquinas (1225-1274). Maimonides shares with them not only a thorough understanding of Aristotelian philosophy, but also an attempt to reconcile that philosophical outlook with religion. Yet despite their shared outlook and common purpose, their respective views on the relationship between religion and philosophy, between faith and reason, are quite different. The difference is, no doubt, in part explained by the disparate religious framework of each: Judaism for Maimonides, Islam for Averroes, and Christianity for Aquinas. It is from their respective religious framework that each derives a particular conception of religious belief, faith, revelation, God, and other notions. I will not explicitly explore these underlying religious differences. Instead, my focus will be philosophical, directed to faith as an epistemic activity. In this sense, faith involves a way of holding and justifying beliefs on the basis of divine revelation, which may manifest itself through such diverse channels

² See, for instance, Richard C. Dales, *Medieval Discussions of the Eternity of the World* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990); and Herbert A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

³ See, for instance, Donald M. MacKay, *Science and the Quest for Meaning* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982); Michael C. Banner, *The Justification of Science and the Rationality of Religious Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Joseph A. Buijs, "Religion, Science and Philosophy: How Are They Compatible?" *Religious Studies and Theology*, 11 (January 1991), 27-38; and Philip Luscombe, *Groundwork of Science and Religion* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2000).

as sacred scriptures, prophecy, or tradition. It is the purported truth-claims of these beliefs that generate the problem of faith and reason and of the relationship between religion and philosophy, or between religion and science.

Maimonides closely links religious beliefs to a rationally justified pursuit of truth. In this respect, he differs from prevalent contemporary views that tend to disassociate religion from science, or religion from philosophy, because they consider faith and reason to be totally unrelated. Nevertheless, he also holds beliefs of faith, typical of religion, and beliefs of reason, characteristic of philosophy, to have distinct yet mutually complementary epistemic functions. And in that respect, he parts company with his medieval counterparts who tend to view one subservient to the other. In particular, I will argue that beliefs of faith for Maimonides are less rational than they are for Averroes and more rational than they are for Aquinas.

I will proceed by first presenting the view of Averroes and then of Aquinas. I will then show how Maimonides differs from both in his account of beliefs of faith and of their relationship with the rational beliefs of philosophy. I will conclude by applying the view of Maimonides on the relationship between religion and philosophy to the analogous controversy today over the relationship between religion and science.

Averroes

Averroes' position on the relation between religion and philosophy is explicitly developed in his *Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl*.⁴ Although there is some discussion on the precise nature and extent of his argumentation, there is general agreement that Averroes gives priority of place to philosophy.⁵ In outline Averroes maintains a dual conception of religious beliefs:

⁴ Averroes, "The Decisive Treatise Determining the Nature of the Connection Between Religion and Philosophy," translated by George F. Hourani in *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London: Luzac, 1967), 44-71; reprinted in *Philosophy in the Middle Ages, the Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Traditions*, ed. Arthur Hyman and James J. Walsh, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983), 297-316.

⁵ See, for instance, Gilson, *Reason and Revelation*, 37-53; and his *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 219; George F. Hourani, "Introduction," in *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London: Luzac, 1967), 20-37; Majid Fakhry, "Philosophy and Scripture in the Theology of Averroes," *Medieval Studies* 30 (1968), 78-89; Alfred L. Ivry, "Towards a Unified View of Averroes' Philosophy," *Philosophical Forum*, n.s. 4 (1972-1973), 109-11; Oliver Leaman, *Averroes and His Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 144-60; Muhsin Mahdi, "Remarks on Averroes' Decisive Treatise," in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy, Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani*, ed. Michael E.

one a fully intellectualized conception characteristic of an educated believer, the other a more traditional conception characteristic of an ordinary believer. The first kind of belief, in both content and justification, derives from the intellectual understanding and demonstrative reasoning of philosophy. They amount to beliefs of reason. The second kind is based on Qur'ānic texts supplemented by traditionally accepted interpretations and methods of reasoning.⁶ Insofar as these beliefs rely on authority or consensus, they amount to beliefs of faith. Not only are the former different from the latter, but beliefs of faith are also inferior, and indeed subject to, beliefs of reason. Thus, in Averroes' view, philosophy becomes a necessary component to religion; the philosophic beliefs of reason direct and correct the traditional beliefs of faith.

Averroes' argument hinges on his analysis of the nature of religion and revelation alongside that of the nature of philosophy and demonstrative knowledge. First of all, Averroes interprets the Qur'ān to prescribe, rather than to prohibit, the study of philosophy, because selected texts urge a reflective understanding of all beings in creation, including God. But that is precisely what philosophy on its Aristotelian conception provides through its demonstrative knowledge of the essence of things.⁷ Moreover, he contends that the content of revelation expressed in the Qur'ān is co-extensive with the content of philosophy. The Qur'ān teaches true beliefs about God, human beings, and happiness, as well as right conduct that leads to eternal happiness. But this teaching corresponds with the domain of theoretical and practical philosophy, respectively.⁸ Nevertheless, in their formulation and justification philosophical claims are different from revealed claims. While revealed claims rely on Qur'ānic texts and their interpretation as the Word of God, philosophical claims rely on demonstrative reasoning, if they are theoretical, and on prudential reasoning, if they are practical. Since neither the Qur'ān nor the Mutakallimūn (Islamic theologians) explicitly use demonstrative or prudential reasoning to justify their claims, philosophy advances a knowledge that is external to religion. Consequently, despite their co-

Marmura (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 188-202; Jeremiah Hackett, "Averroes and Roger Bacon on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy," in *A Straight Path*, ed. Ruth Link-Salinger, et al. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 98-112; Richard C. Taylor, "Faith and Reason, Religion and Philosophy: Four Views from Medieval Islam and Christianity," in *Philosophy and the God of Abraham*, ed. R. James Long (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1991), 217-33.

⁶ See Arberry, *Revelation and Reason*, 16-18; Hourani, "Introduction," 2-3.

⁷ See Averroes, "Treatise," ch. 1: 44-45 (page references are to the edition of Hourani).

⁸ See Averroes, "Treatise," ch. 3: 63.

extensive domains, philosophical claims of reason, according to Averroes, may yet contradict religious claims of faith, as they in fact do on such issues as God's foreknowledge of particulars, the eternity of the world, or personal immortality.⁹

Averroes' approach here is, in effect, to claim that such conflict is apparent only, on the ground that both religion and philosophy indeed issue in true claims, albeit in different ways, but also that the very conception of truth is unitary: "for truth does not oppose truth but accords with it and bears witness to it."¹⁰ In principle conflicts between religious and philosophical claims can be resolved; the question is how. Averroes' answer is to argue for a reinterpretation of religious claims based on faith, when these, in their formulation, contradict philosophical claims based on demonstrative reasoning.

When philosophy, according to Averroes, establishes its claims by demonstrative reasoning, it results in intellectual understanding and certainty. There is no point in denying such claims; nor is any other justification needed. However, such claims are intelligible only to those capable by natural talent and education to understand demonstrative reasoning; they could be acknowledged to be true only by the philosophically astute.¹¹ But religion, he notes, is needed for the ultimate happiness of all, not just the philosophically astute. As a result, revelation and its expression in the Qur'ān must advance a method of ascertaining its true claims suitable, not only for the educated few, but for others as well.¹² Given the coextensive domains of religion and philosophy and given different intellectual capabilities, Averroes suggests there are—and must be—different ways of ascertaining the true claims of religion.

Indeed, the Qur'ān allows both a literal, external meaning and an allegorical, hidden meaning for some of its texts. The reason, on Averroes' interpretation, is precisely that people have different intellectual capabilities.¹³ Only some are capable of apprehending the deeper meaning offered by an allegorical interpretation.

Specifically, Averroes explains that there are two ways of apprehending the content of claims and three ways of ascertaining them to

⁹ See Averroes, "Treatise," ch. 2: 55-56 and 61.

¹⁰ Averroes, "Treatise," ch. 2: 50. The so-called "double-truth" theory has mistakenly been associated with Averroes by later Christian thinkers. See Harry A. Wolfson, "The Twice-Revealed Averroes," *Speculum*, 36 (1961), 373-92; and Fakhry, "Philosophy and Scripture," 80-81.

¹¹ See Averroes, "Treatise," ch. 1: 46-49.

¹² See Averroes, "Treatise," 49.

¹³ See Averroes, "Treatise," ch. 2: 51 and 59.

be true. In this he relies on Aristotle's theory of knowledge, which requires the apprehension of relevant concepts with respect to the content of claims and assent to a judgement with respect to ascertaining its truth. However, the relevant concepts may, on the one hand, denote the essence of things, "the object itself"; on the other hand, they may denote a sensible image or representation of things, "a symbol of it".¹⁴ Apprehending the essence of things requires the abstractive operation of the intellect; apprehending a sensible image employs the imagination. What the imagination apprehends and what the intellect apprehends are, for Averroes, quite different in content. The imagination apprehends only what is particular and concrete; the intellect, what is abstract and general.¹⁵

As there are different ways of apprehending the content of claims, by either the intellect or the imagination, so there are different ways to acknowledge the truth of judgments, namely, on the basis of demonstrative reasoning, dialectical reasoning, or rhetorical reasoning.¹⁶ While demonstrative reasoning attains certainty, neither dialectical nor rhetorical reasoning does. Dialectical reasoning is a form of reasoning by consensus; Averroes takes it to be typical of the legal reasoning employed by the Mutakallimun.¹⁷ Rhetorical reasoning, instead, amounts to accepting a judgment to be true on the mere persuasion of others, that is, on the basis of authority. Whereas demonstrative reasoning is coupled with an apprehension of the essence of things by the intellect, both dialectical reasoning and rhetorical reasoning are coupled with an apprehension of symbols or copies of things by the imagination, because both rely on a written text or the spoken word of another.

Averroes ranks these methods of ascertaining truths. Claims based on either dialectical or rhetorical reasoning and involving the imagination do not attain the intellectual understanding and certainty of demonstrative reasoning. For that reason, beliefs justified by dialectical or rhetorical reasoning are quite inferior to demonstrative knowledge. Moreover, which method of ascertaining truths is to be used depends on varying intellectual capabilities. Thus, Averroes associates demonstrative

¹⁴ See Averroes, "Treatise," ch. 1: 49 and ch. 3: 63-64.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the function of the imagination see Harry A. Wolfson, "The Internal Senses in Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew Philosophic Texts," in *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, ed. Isadore Twersky and George H. Williams, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 250-314.

¹⁶ See Averroes, "Treatise," ch 1: 49 and ch 3: 64.

¹⁷ See Averroes, "Treatise," ch. 2: 52-53 and ch. 3: 65.

reasoning with philosophers; dialectical reasoning with theologians; and rhetorical reasoning with the ordinary religious believer.¹⁸

The upshot of these considerations is, first, that the literal or external meaning of scriptural texts, while the basis for the religious beliefs of the ordinary believer, may also be intellectually inadequate; and, second, that an allegorical or hidden meaning, uncovered only by the demonstrative reasoning intelligible to philosophers, provides a more adequate understanding.

Averroes advances several canons of scriptural interpretation, depending on the kind of reasoning that is available for the truth of textual claims.¹⁹ First, if claims can be shown to be true by all three methods of reasoning, then the corresponding scriptural texts have only a literal, and no allegorical, meaning. An example would be a belief in the oneness of God; it is philosophically demonstrable and it is asserted in the Qur'ān. Here there is no excuse for error. Secondly, if a claim, held to be true by dialectical and rhetorical reasoning, is contradicted by a claim shown to be true by demonstrative reasoning, then the text has both a literal and an allegorical interpretation. In that case, the literal meaning provides an imaginative understanding to the ordinary believer, corresponding to the real or hidden meaning understood by philosophers. An example would be anthropomorphic descriptions of God. They allow the ordinary believer to acknowledge God in some way; but the philosopher understands God to be incorporeal in His nature. Here error is excused for the ordinary believer because of ignorance, but it is not excused for the philosopher. Finally, there are some claims which cannot be established by demonstrative reasoning, for instance, those describing an afterlife. In that case, there is no clear determination whether texts should be interpreted literally or allegorically. And since there is no agreement among scholars, error is excused even for them on such issues.

Thus, for Averroes, the criterion for allegorical interpretation of scriptural texts is demonstrative reasoning.²⁰ The demonstrative knowledge of philosophy determines whether a text is to be interpreted allegorically; it also determines what is the hidden and true meaning of an allegorical text.²¹

¹⁸ See Averroes, "Treatise," ch. 2: 59 and ch. 3: 65.

¹⁹ See Averroes, "Treatise," ch. 2: 58-61.

²⁰ See Averroes, "Treatise," ch. 2: 51: "So we affirm definitely that whenever the conclusion of a demonstration is in conflict with the apparent meaning of Scriptures, that apparent meaning admits of allegorical interpretation according to the rules for such interpretation in Arabic."

²¹ See Averroes, "Treatise," ch. 3: 65: "In general, everything in these [texts] which admits of allegorical interpretation can only be understood by demonstration."

Why, for Averroes, philosophy is a necessary component to religion is, I believe, now clear. Religion has a multifarious approach to truth because it needs to accommodate people of different intellectual capabilities. The philosophically educated believer is capable of understanding truths which the ordinary believer cannot understand. And so the latter, relying on the literal meaning of scriptural texts and the authoritative interpretations of theologians, have only an imperfect and inferior grasp of certain truths. Even theologians, in Averroes' view, fare not much better in their apprehension of religious beliefs, since they too ultimately appeal to scriptural texts and traditional interpretations. Both the ordinary believer and the theologian apprehend with the imagination and rely either on the authority of scriptures or the consensus of tradition. In other words, their religious beliefs involve an epistemic activity that attains truth but neither with certainty nor with understanding. Philosophical beliefs do attain certainty and understanding when they involve demonstrative reasoning. It is therefore the demonstrative reasoning of philosophy that offers a correct interpretation of the content of religious beliefs held on faith. It also cancels out faith. For when it is understood with certainty why something is true, which is precisely what demonstrative reasoning provides, then there is no point in merely acknowledging the claim to be true on the basis of authority or consensus. Beliefs held on faith—for Averroes those beliefs held on textual authority or oral tradition—are needed for those incapable of understanding; they are irrelevant to those who do understand. Thus, the religious beliefs of faith of both the ordinary believer and the theologian take on a practical function, rather than an intellectual one. Those equipped only with faith are incapable of arriving at an intellectually adequate truth on their own, for beyond the scope of philosophical understanding there is only speculation and matters of speculation are neither demonstrably true nor demonstrably false.²² In both justifying and interpreting the very content of religious beliefs, philosophy corrects the imperfect and misleading apprehension of ordinary believers and at the same time directs it towards the intellectually adequate understanding of philosophers.

²² Averroes seems to acknowledge adherence to religious beliefs beyond the scope of demonstrative reasoning; see Fakhry, "Philosophy and Scripture," 88. But Hourani contests the textual basis of this claim; see Hourani, "Introduction," 26-27. Moreover, if revelation did extend beyond the scope of philosophy, then it could only be justified by a direct appeal to prophetic knowledge. Averroes' theory of prophecy, however, attempts to assimilate prophetic knowledge into philosophical understanding without demonstrative reasoning; see, for instance, Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam, Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

In one sense, Averroes echoes the view of Alfarabi that "religion is an imitation of philosophy".²³ But in another sense, he absorbs philosophy into religion. Religion is an imitation of philosophy only on a traditional understanding that takes religious beliefs to be held on the authority of scriptures, tradition, or religious leaders. In so far as faith is associated with religious beliefs of this kind and reason with the demonstrative knowledge of philosophy, faith is inferior to reason. However, if religion is understood in the broad sense of dealing with ultimate human happiness in relation to the divine, then religion incorporates reason alongside faith.

Aquinas

A number of Aquinas's views parallel those of Averroes. Nevertheless, Aquinas comes to quite a different conclusion on the relationship between religion and philosophy. The details of his position have been the subject of debate among Thomistic scholars.²⁴ His general position, however, seems clear enough. For Aquinas, it is by faith that humans rightfully acknowledge truths of revelation; it also necessarily extends beyond the domain of reason or intellectual understanding. Truths of faith, and those of theology that expand on faith, not only direct, but also complement, the use of reason in philosophy. Unlike Averroes who argued that reason takes precedence over faith, Aquinas, in what appears to be a direct allusion to Averroes, insists that ultimately faith should take precedence over reason.²⁵

²³ Alfarabi, "Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle," in *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. Hyman and Walsh, 228. For Alfarabi's view see, for instance, Lawrence V. Berman, "Maimonides, the Disciple of Alfarabi," in *Maimonides, a Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Joseph A. Buijs (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 197-200; and Hackett, "Averroes and Bacon," 98-112.

²⁴ The debate focuses on the notion of Christian philosophy that emerges from Aquinas's view; in particular on how independent such a philosophy is from theology. Gilson's interpretation is the occasion for this debate. For his position see Gilson, *Reason and Revelation*, 69-99; his *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by L. K. Shook (New York: Random House, 1956), 3-25; and his *The Spirit of Thomism* (New York: P. J. Kennedy, 1964), 9-32. For a critical discussion and an alternative interpretation see John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Problem of Christian Philosophy," in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 1-33; and his "The Possibility of a Christian Philosophy: A Thomistic Perspective," *Faith and Philosophy*, 2 (1984), 272-90.

²⁵ See Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio in Librum Boethii de Trinitate* [hereafter *De Trin.*] Q. 2, a. 2: "one may err because in matters of faith he makes reason precede faith, instead of faith precede reason, as when someone is willing to believe only what he can dis-

His conclusion derives basically from two considerations, scattered in different works. On the one hand, he maintains a difference between faith and knowledge because they comprise two distinct epistemic activities. On the other hand, in parallel fashion, he contends that there is a difference between theology and philosophy because they comprise two distinct bodies of knowledge.

Adopting the scriptural definition of faith as "the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not" (Heb. 11:1), Aquinas goes on to distinguish faith from other intellectual activities and in particular from knowledge.²⁶ Both faith and knowledge involve the intellect, because that is the faculty that recognizes truth and assents to it. But the grounds for assent are different in either case. In the case of knowledge, what is true forces itself, so to speak, on the intellect either by way of immediate recognition, as with self-evidently true principles, or by way of logical demonstration, as with conclusions derived from first principles. The intellect assents, because in a sense it "sees" the truth in the claims it considers.²⁷ In the case of faith, on the contrary, the intellect assents to truth "through an act of choice, whereby it turns voluntarily to one side rather than to the other" of two competing claims and accepts it with "certainty and no fear."²⁸ Here, the intellect assents, not because of any evidence it sees, but because of the will that induces the intellect to accept the authority of God's word. Faith involves certainty, for Aquinas, on the additional belief that divine wisdom, which is the ultimate source of divine revelation, neither misleads nor falls into error.²⁹ From these considerations, Aquinas concludes that one and the same truth cannot be both believed on faith and known by reason by one and the same person.³⁰ One person may acknowledge a truth on faith and another know the same truth by demonstration; similarly, the same person may well first acknowledge a truth on faith and later come to know it because he understands the

cover by reason. It should in fact be just the opposite." See also Taylor, "Faith and Reason," 230-31; and Mark D. Jordan, "Theology and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 232-51.

²⁶ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, [hereafter *ST*] II-II, Q. 4, a. 1; see also *De Trin.*, Q. 3, a. 1.

²⁷ See *ST*, II-II, Q. 1, a. 4; *De Trin.*, Q. 3, a. 1.

²⁸ See *ST*, II-II, Q. 4, a. 1; *De Trin.*, Q. 3, a. 1.

²⁹ See *ST*, I, Q. 1, a. 5 and a. 8; *De Trin.*, Q. 3, a. 1; *Summa Contra Gentiles* [hereafter *SCG*], I, ch. 7.

³⁰ See *ST*, II-II, Q. 1, a. 5; *De Trin.*, Q. 2, a. 2 ad 5; see also John I. Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 161-210.

demonstration for it. But since the very act of faith is different from an act of knowledge, the one precludes the other.

Just as faith and knowledge are distinct epistemic activities for Aquinas, so are theology and philosophy distinct bodies of knowledge, *scientia* or science in the terminology of Aquinas.³¹ Although as science both seek understanding and both use the same method of demonstration from first principles, the truth of first principles in theology are accepted on faith and rooted in divine wisdom, whereas the truth of first principles in philosophy are self-evident to the intellect and hence rooted in human wisdom.³² Despite a similarly discursive method, theological understanding differs from philosophical understanding because theological understanding is contingent on faith. Thus the initial fundamental activity in theology is to believe on faith, by which *the will* directs *the intellect* to assent to truth; a derivative activity is to understand on the basis of faith, by which the intellect seeks a discursive justification for truth to which it has already assented.³³ The appropriate activity in philosophy, to the contrary, is to know by reason, by which conversely *the intellect* directs *the will* to assent to truth. Likewise, the purpose of revelation—and thus of the understanding attained in theology—is to attain salvation; its first principles and conclusions are meant to be accessible to all. The purpose of philosophy is to acquire understanding for its own sake; its first principles and conclusions are accessible only to those with the requisite intellectual capabilities and education.³⁴ Finally, the subject matter of theology is God as the end of human beings; that of philosophy is reality and its principles. Since the latter includes God, philosophy, according to Aquinas, can lead up to theology. At least some truths acquired by human reason can approach or approximate truths of faith. But truths of reason never fully equal truths of faith because of their different focus.³⁵ Formally and materially faith and

³¹ *Scientia* or science, for Aquinas, is modeled on Aristotle's discursive knowledge from first principles to apodictic conclusions. Because of its technical usage in Aquinas, Jenkins uses only the Latin *scientia* in his study of Aquinas; see his *Knowledge and Faith*, especially 11-98.

³² See *ST*, I, Q. 1, a. 2 and a. 8; Q. 6, a. 4; *De Trin.*, Q. 2, a. 2.

³³ By "intellect" here is meant the human intellect in its natural capabilities. On Jenkins interpretation of faith in Aquinas, the will is motivated to give assent through the light of revelation and grace which infuses and transforms the human intellect. Jenkins thus offers what he calls a supernatural externalist account of faith, in contrast to both a naturalist and voluntarist account. See his *Knowledge and Faith*, 163-197.

³⁴ See *ST*, I, Q. 1, a. 1; *De Trin.*, Q. 3, a. 1; *SCG*, I, ch. 4.

³⁵ See *ST*, I, Q. 1, a. 3 and a. 7; II-II, Q. 1, a. 1; *De Trin.*, Q. 2, a. 2 and a. 3; *SCG*, I, ch. 3 and 8.

knowledge differ: formally, because each is a different sort of activity; materially, because the one focuses on salvation and the other on understanding. Consequently, theology and philosophy differ fundamentally in their epistemology, as well as their respective tasks.

In light of the above differences between religious faith and philosophic knowledge, on the one hand, and theology and philosophy, on the other, how Aquinas understands the relationship between religion and philosophy can now be sketched. Philosophy, in its own subject matter, purpose and methodology, constitutes the highest wisdom available to the human intellect, relying on its own natural capabilities. However, in its natural capabilities the human intellect is neither unlimited nor perfect.³⁶ While philosophy, thus, provides one path to truth, it is not the only path. Faith is another. And because faith is rooted in divine revelation and the infallible wisdom of God, it both channels and surpasses human knowledge.³⁷ In both content and certainty, faith extends beyond the natural capabilities of the human intellect. Theology not only uses philosophy in its own attempts to understand revelation; theology also supplements the limited knowledge acquired within philosophy. The point is well illustrated in the case of knowledge about God. Aquinas maintains that the human intellect can attain a natural knowledge of God by logical demonstration, but it is a limited knowledge. Whereas human beings can at least come to know the fact that God exists, they cannot adequately comprehend what He is.³⁸ Nevertheless, revelation and hence faith provide a more perfect comprehension of God, both in the present life and afterlife.³⁹

As a result, Aquinas, like Averroes, concludes that no conflict is in principle possible between faith and knowledge, between the claims of theology and those of philosophy: "it is impossible that the truth of faith should be opposed to those principles that the human reason knows naturally."⁴⁰ In the event of an apparent conflict, however, Aquinas is quite clear that reason or philosophy must be at fault. Unlike Averroes, who maintains that demonstrative reasoning is in effect the ultimate criterion of truth, Aquinas contends that any arguments against faith could

³⁶ See *De Trin.*, Q. 2, a. 1 and a. 3; *SCG*, I, ch. 2 and 4; *ST*, I, Q. 1, a. 5 and a. 6. This limitation applies to both theoretical knowledge that comprises wisdom and to practical knowledge that depends on prudence; see Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, *Maimonides and St. Thomas on the Limits of Reason* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 7 and 185.

³⁷ See *De Trin.*, Q. 2, a. 3; *ST*, I, Q. 1, a. 8; *SCG*, I, ch. 5.

³⁸ See *De Trin.*, Q. 6, a. 3; *ST*, I, Q. 3, preamble; Q. 12, a. 12; *SCG*, I, ch. 14.

³⁹ See *ST*, I, Q. 12, a. 13.

⁴⁰ *SCG*, I, ch. 7. See *ST*, I, Q. 1, a. 8; and *De Trin.*, Q. 2, a. 3.

not constitute proper demonstrations. At best they are probable arguments and at worst sophistical arguments, neither of which establish their conclusions with certainty.⁴¹

The implication is that philosophy and reason have no direct control over the content of faith, as they do for Averroes. A revealed truth held on faith is neither established nor disproved by demonstration. Even in the case of truths that fall within the domain of both philosophy and theology, their comprehension differs. In the case of God, for instance, philosophical demonstration concludes with an abstract, metaphysical conception which is not quite the revealed God of religion. Nevertheless, the demonstrative knowledge of philosophy can indirectly contribute to religion by justifying the framework or preconditions of faith.⁴² That is, in acknowledging revealed truths, the act of faith assumes the fact that revelation does occur or has occurred. But faith cannot itself establish that fact without begging the question, for the fact of revelation presupposes that there is a God and that He does in some way interact with human beings. For this reason, according to Aquinas, philosophy is propaedeutic to theology and faith. The demonstrative reasoning of philosophy establishes the fact that there is a God. Historical evidence establishes the fact that God communicates with human beings.⁴³ Thus, philosophy can show that faith is reasonable in the sense that its preconditions can be shown to be true; it cannot show that the content of faith is reasonable in the sense that its truth can always be known to be true by rational demonstration.

In practical terms, faith urges assent to a truth without intellectual understanding, as it does in the case of the Christian belief in the Trinity or the Incarnation. And faith directs reason in those cases in which they apparently conflict, as it does, for instance on the issue of individual versus universal immortality.⁴⁴ In thus extending beyond the domain of philosophy, revelation and theology necessarily complement the limitations inherent in philosophy.

⁴¹ See *SCG*, I, ch. 7: "whatever arguments are brought forward against the doctrines of faith are conclusions incorrectly derived from the first and self-evident principles imbedded in nature. Such conclusions do not have the force of demonstration; they are arguments that are either probable or sophistical"; see also *De Trin.*, Q. 2, a. 3; and *ST*, I, Q. 1, a. 8.

⁴² See *De Trin.*, Q. 2, a. 3.

⁴³ See, for instance, Gilson, *Reason and Revelation*, 81-82.

⁴⁴ Aquinas contends that a universal soul and universal immortality, attributed to Averroes, cannot be demonstrated because it is false. Although Aquinas offers argumentation for the view that there is individual immortality, he also shows that the contrary view, namely, that there is no individual immortality, is untenable in part because it conflicts with faith and revealed truth; see, in particular, *De Unitate Intellectus contra Averroistas*.

Maimonides

In his approach to the problem of religion and philosophy, Maimonides shares a number of aspects with both Averroes and Aquinas. Like Averroes, he maintains that there are different ways of holding beliefs alongside different levels of interpretation of scriptural texts; he also admits, as does Averroes for the Qurʾān, that in their subject matter the teachings of the Torah overlap with those of philosophy. Like Aquinas, he requires reason to justify the framework of religious beliefs yet also admits that reason is inherently limited. Along with both Averroes and Aquinas, Maimonides insists on the unity of truth but also on diverse sources of truth.

Yet despite these shared views, Maimonides' conclusion to the problem is neither that of Averroes nor that of Aquinas. Instead, he argues that religious beliefs are to be under the control of reason in a way that they are not for Aquinas; and he acknowledges that such beliefs may extend beyond the control of reason in a way that they cannot for Averroes. Maimonides' understanding of the relationship between religion and philosophy emerges from his views on three specific issues: 1) sources of truth; 2) kinds of beliefs; and 3) the overlap in subject matter between scriptures and philosophy.

In various works, Maimonides alludes to several sources of truth. They can be reduced to a list of three: reason, perception, and tradition.⁴⁵ Reason, as a source of truth, includes the recognition of self-evident principles, such as the claim that the whole is greater than its parts, as well as conclusions derived from first principles by demonstration, such as the Pythagorean theorem in geometry. Perception involves the use of external and internal senses; it establishes the truth of such claims as "This is red" and "Fire is hot". Tradition as a source of truth includes the written or oral pronouncements of prophets, exemplified by scriptural claims; conventional practices of either a moral or prudential kind,

⁴⁵ The clearest statement is his "Letter on Astrology," in *A Maimonides Reader*, ed. Isadore Twersky (New York: Behrman House, 1972), 465: "Know, my masters, that it is not proper for a man to accept as trustworthy anything other than one of these three things. The first is a thing for which there is a clear proof deriving from one's reasoning—such as arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. The second is a thing that a man perceives through one of the five senses—such as when he knows with certainty that this is red and this is black and the like through the sight of the eye . . . The third is a thing that a man receives from the prophets or from the righteous." See also his *The Guide of the Perplexed* [hereafter *Guide*], translated by Shlomo Pines (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), I, 51, p. 111; and his *Treatise on Logic* [hereafter *Logic*], edited and translated by Israel Efros (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1938), ch. 8: 47-48.

for instance, that immodesty is wrong or that repayment of benefactors is right; and finally conclusions drawn from either of these, illustrated by Talmudic and rabbinic pronouncements.

Yet these sources are not equally reliable indicators of truth. The use of reason gives certitude and so does use of the external senses, provided they operate normally. But the use of tradition does not entail certitude. Prophecy, one of the sources of traditional truths, does not entail certitude, because it involves an appeal to an authority whose reliability needs to be substantiated; not all who claim to be prophets are authentic prophets.⁴⁶ And conventions, the other source of traditional truths, do not entail certitude, because they derive from a consensus, which need not be, and often is not, universal; not all communities adopt the same conventions.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, despite such differences in reliability, Maimonides urges that "one should accept the truth from whatever source it proceeds."⁴⁸ As with Averroes and Aquinas, he accepts the so-called principle of the unity of truth; insofar as diverse sources do lead to true claims at all, they cannot in principle conflict. Consequently, any conflict that emerges is at best only apparent.

Parallel to diverse sources of truth, Maimonides also acknowledges different kinds of true beliefs according to their content and to the way they are apprehended. In the *Guide* a clear distinction emerges between "imaginary beliefs" and "intellectual beliefs".⁴⁹ Imaginary beliefs are those whose content are sense-images which have been either retained by the imagination once the immediate experience has elapsed or else sense-images constructed by the imagination from previously experienced ones. The belief, for instance, that what I drank this morning was a pleasantly tasting cup of coffee illustrates the one kind of imaginary belief, the retention or recall of an experienced object; the belief that unicorns are tiny single-horned horses illustrates the other kind, the formation of a fanciful object of experience. Intellectual beliefs, instead, are those whose content are the essences or concepts of things abstracted and apprehended by the intellect. That man is a rational animal and that a necessary being is absolutely simple are examples of intellectual beliefs.

⁴⁶ For the distinction between true and false prophets see *Guide*, II, 38, pp. 377-378; also *Logic*, ch. 8: 47.

⁴⁷ See *Logic*, ch. 8: 47.

⁴⁸ Moses Maimonides, *The Eight Chapters of Maimonides on Ethics (Shemonah Perakim)*, edited and translated, with an introduction, by Joseph I. Gorfinkle (New York: AMS Press, 1966), Foreword, 36; reprinted in *Maimonides Reader*, Twersky, 363.

⁴⁹ See *Guide*, I, 2, pp. 25-26; 5, p. 29; 26, pp. 56-57; 32, pp. 68-70; 46, pp. 97-98; 50, pp. 111-112; 68, pp. 161-162 and p. 166; 71, pp. 178-80; II, 12, p. 446; III, 51, p. 621; 54, pp. 633-4.

In the context of the *Guide*, Maimonides associates the intellectual beliefs with knowledge based on reason and demonstration that is typical of philosophers. He associates imaginary beliefs with mere opinion, held on authority or consensus that is typical of the ordinary Jewish believer who accepts the scriptural and rabbinic tradition.⁵⁰ Reminiscent of Averroes' classification of beliefs, Maimonides goes on to rank intellectual beliefs above imaginary beliefs.⁵¹ Intellectual beliefs, he maintains, form a reliable indicator of reality and hence of truth, first, because they retain a direct link with reality through its abstracted concepts and, second, because they entail certitude.⁵² Imaginary beliefs attain neither a direct link with reality nor certitude. Given the way Maimonides understands the operation of the imagination, imaginary beliefs cannot be assured of representing reality accurately because the sense-images that the imagination retains or constructs are not the essences or true reality of things. And such beliefs do not attain certitude because, when an object is no longer present to the sense, e.g., the cup of coffee I drank this morning, the image retained by the imagination cannot be compared with the actually perceived object; or else, when an artificial sense-image is constructed by the imagination, e.g., that of a unicorn, the image thus apprehended simply does not compare with any actually perceived object.⁵³

The implication of the above distinction is that intellectual beliefs do indeed form true beliefs in that they are either evidently or demonstrably true, e.g., that man is rational or that a necessary being has no attributes. Imaginary beliefs may form true beliefs, e.g., that human beings are tall or that tigers are fierce. On the other hand, imaginary beliefs may also form false beliefs, e.g., that God has physical attributes; and as with the belief that unicorns are horned creatures, they certainly always run the risk of leading to false conclusions about reality.

In addition to these two ways of believing, one intellectually and the other imaginatively, Maimonides correlates the subject matter of religion with the subject matter of philosophy. The content of religion, namely, its beliefs and practices, is derived from scriptures and elucidated in the rabbinic tradition. But scriptures formulate part of their

⁵⁰ See *Guide*, I, 31, p. 66; 73, p. 209; 76, p. 231.

⁵¹ See *Guide*, III, 51, pp. 618-19. For a more detailed discussion see Joseph A. Buijs, "Believers, Prophets and Philosophers: Maimonides on Knowledge," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 21 (1992), 43-56.

⁵² See *Guide*, I, 73, p. 209.

⁵³ See *Guide*, I, 60, p. 116 and 73, p. 166; II, 36, p. 370; *Eight Chapters*, ch. 1: 41; see also Buijs, "Believers," 48-50.

teaching in parables and ambiguous terms, which of their nature reveal, and at the same time conceal, a meaning. Scriptures use this language, Maimonides contends, because they admit a secret teaching whose truth is only partially understood by hints and flashes of insight, so to speak.⁵⁴ Such insights to what Maimonides calls “the secrets” of scriptures require certain intellectual and moral prerequisites. Those who satisfy the prerequisites, that is, the intended reader of the *Guide*, may be led to insights into scriptural secrets but only by way of an elusive style.⁵⁵ Those who lack these prerequisites are not to have the secret teachings communicated to them, for fear of having the teachings misunderstood and thus of leading to total unbelief.⁵⁶ Yet these “secrets”, for Maimonides, are central to religious belief and practice; they constitute the foundations of Judaism.⁵⁷ Thus he contends that the ordinary believer acknowledges them to be true on the basis of imaginary beliefs derived from a literal meaning of scriptural texts. For instance, Maimonides lists the nature of prophecy among the secret teachings of scriptures.⁵⁸ On an imaginary belief, prophecy is admitted to occur but the prophetic experience

⁵⁴ See *Guide*, Intro. to I, pp. 5-12.

⁵⁵ See *Guide*, “Epistle Dedicatory” and Intro to I, pp. 7-8. For a discussion of Maimonides’ so-called esotericism in the *Guide* see Leo Strauss, “The Literary Character of the *Guide of the Perplexed*,” in *Essays on Maimonides, an Octocentennial Volume*, ed. Salo Wittmayer Baron (New York: Columbia University press, 1941), 37-91; reprinted in abridged form in *Maimonides, a Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Joseph A. Buijs (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 30-58; Joseph A. Buijs, “The Philosophical Character of Maimonides’ *Guide*—A Critique of Strauss’ Interpretation,” *Judaism*, 27 (Fall 1978), 448-57; Leonard S. Kravitz, *The Hidden Doctrine of Maimonides’ Guide for the Perplexed, Philosophical and Religious God-Language in Tension* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988); Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, “The Nature of Biblical Language in Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*: Parabolic Contradictions and Negative Attributions,” *Proceedings of the Patristic, Mediaeval and Renaissance Conference*, 12-13 (1987-1988), 113-27; Marvin Fox, “The Esoteric Method,” in *Interpreting Maimonides. Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics, and Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 47-66. Moshe Idel refers to a tradition of Jewish esotericism, which Maimonides sought to limit and correct by his own esotericism; see Moshe Idel, “Sitre ‘Araiyot in Maimonides’ Thought,” in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. Shlomo Pines and Yirmiyahu Yovel (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), 84-87. Oliver Leaman explicitly dismisses an esoteric teaching in his exposition of Maimonides views; Oliver Leaman, *Moses Maimonides*, revised edition (Surrey: Curzon, 1997), 2-15.

⁵⁶ See *Guide*, Intro. to I, pp. 5-10; Epistle Dedicatory, pp. 3-4; I, 33, p. 72; 34, p. 78; Intro. to III, p. 415.

⁵⁷ See *Guide*, Intro. to I, p. 6; 35, p. 80; II, 2, pp. 253-4; 25, p. 328; III, 24, pp. 501-2; 27, p. 511. For a discussion and interpretation see Arthur Hyman, “Maimonides’ ‘Thirteen Principles’,” in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 119-44.

⁵⁸ See *Guide*, I, 35, p. 80.

is also understood literally to involve hearing voices and seeing visions. But that is not the true nature of prophecy and hence not the hidden or metaphorical meaning embedded in Scriptural texts on prophecy.⁵⁹

On the Aristotelian conception Maimonides adopts, philosophy in its practical domain corresponds to the moral and social directives of Judaism; in its theoretical domain, to the foundations of Judaism, that is, to the "secrets" of scriptures. In particular, Maimonides explicitly identifies *ma'aseh bereshith* (the Account of the Beginning) and *ma'aseh merkabah* (the Account of the Chariot), claimed to be two of the central teachings of scriptures, with the Aristotelian sciences of physics and metaphysics, respectively.⁶⁰ Elsewhere, he urges a gradual ascent through the philosophical disciplines of physics and metaphysics towards an intellectual belief of God.⁶¹ What is typical of philosophy, of course, is that its true claims are not only apprehended but also understood to be true on the basis of intellectual beliefs and of demonstrative knowledge.

In their formulation as well as their justification religious claims differ from philosophical claims; in their truth content they do not. Religious claims, for Maimonides, are those expressive of scriptural teachings held to be true on prophetic authority or of derivative teachings held to be true on rabbinic authority. Philosophical claims, in the Aristotelian sense suggested by Maimonides, are those expressive of reality held to be true by reason and demonstration. Maimonides, therefore, offers a solution to their apparent conflict similar to that of Averroes. The problem arises in the first place because of the multi-leveled meanings in scriptures and the multi-various purposes of religion. Religion is meant to provide all, educated and uneducated alike, with certain beliefs and a certain lifestyle. However, this purpose does not of itself require an intellectually adequate

⁵⁹ See *Guide*, II, 46, pp. 402-3; 36-38, pp. 369-78. Maimonides' explanation of prophecy involves the imagination in conjunction with the intellect. But the role of the imagination in prophecy is problematic, given the above characterization of imaginary beliefs. Thus some commentators see quite a different function of the imagination at work in the case of prophecy. See, for instance, R. V. Feldman, "The Union of Prophetism and Philosophism in the Thought of Maimonides," in *Moses Maimonides 1135-1204*, ed. Isidore Epstein (London: Soncino Press, 1935), 85-104; more recently Massimo Jevollela, "Songe et Prophétie Chez Maïmonide et dans la Tradition Philosophique Qui l'Inspira," in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. Pines and Yovel, 173-84; Jeffrey Macy, "Prophecy in al-Farabi and Maimonides: The Imaginative and Rational Faculties," in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. Pines and Yovel, 185-201; Oliver Leaman, "Maimonides, Imagination and the Objectivity of Prophecy," *Religion*, 18 (1988), 69-80.

⁶⁰ See *Guide*, Intro to I, p. 6. For the Aristotelian division of philosophy see Maimonides' *Logic*, ch. 14, pp. 61-64.

⁶¹ See *Guide*, Intro. to I, p. 9; I, 32-34, pp. 68-79.

understanding. And so Maimonides admits that imaginary beliefs suffice, that is, those beliefs derived from a literal interpretation of scriptures supplemented by rabbinic teachings. But whereas imaginary beliefs do indicate some truth, they also imply at best a misunderstanding and at worst a misrepresentation of reality, if their content is simply taken literally. A correct understanding of reality, if attainable at all, is only had by way of intellectual beliefs. Thus an intellectually adequate understanding of religious beliefs must rely on a figurative meaning of scriptural texts. Like Averroes, Maimonides maintains that the criterion for such a figurative interpretation is provided by intellectual beliefs. Whether a scriptural text is to be taken figuratively, or just literally, and what specific figurative interpretation is to be given is, in effect, determined by the demonstrative knowledge of philosophy.

For this reason Maimonides, in a celebrated parable at the end of the *Guide*, ranks philosophers, "the men of science," above both "students of the Law" and the ordinary Jewish believer.⁶² The ordinary believers rely for their beliefs on students of the Law, on the rabbinic tradition. Students of the Law, in turn, rely only on scriptural texts and, in effect, on prophetic authority. Both ordinary believers and students of the Law have opinion but not knowledge. They enjoy wisdom, but a restricted wisdom that lacks the certitude and understanding of demonstration.⁶³ Philosophers, instead, do attain knowledge and an unrestricted wisdom because of their intellectual beliefs. However, their knowledge is not unlimited; their wisdom is not all inclusive. The nature of God, for instance, and other metaphysical matters are beyond their comprehension.⁶⁴ Consequently, Maimonides goes on to rank prophets above philosophers, not only in their religious comportment but in their intellectual insights.⁶⁵

In light of the above analyses on sources of truth, kinds of beliefs and the subject matter of religion, Maimonides' understanding of the

⁶² See *Guide*, III, 51, pp. 618-20; and Buijs, "Believers," 52-55.

⁶³ See *Guide*, III, 51, p. 619; III, 54, p. 633.

⁶⁴ See *Guide*, I, 31, pp. 65-67; 32, pp. 68-70; 58, pp. 135-37. See, for instance, the study of Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in *Maimonides*, ed. Buijs, 91-121; Marvin Fox, "The Range and Limits of Reason," in *Interpreting Maimonides. Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics, and Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 26-46.

⁶⁵ See *Guide*, II, 38, pp. 376-78; III, 51, pp. 620-21. The nature of prophecy is crucial to both Averroes' and Maimonides' position on religion and philosophy. If their position on religion and philosophy differs in the way I interpret them, then their understanding of prophecy must differ as well, as I suspect it does. However, this issue calls for separate development.

relationship between religion and philosophy can be stated. First, beliefs of faith, those held on the basis of scriptures or tradition, and beliefs of reason, those held on the basis of intellectual demonstration, involve distinct epistemic activities with respect to how the beliefs are formed and how they are justified. Second, conflicts that may arise between these kinds of beliefs are apparent only. Third, such apparent conflicts can be resolved in two ways: one way, on the side of philosophy, is to establish that what is purportedly a true intellectual belief, a matter of demonstrative knowledge, is in fact not so; the other way, on the side of religion, is to note that there are two levels of meanings within scriptures, one of which is literal yet factually false and the other of which is figurative and allegorically true. But this resolution requires the understanding of intellectual beliefs. For Maimonides, then, philosophy supplies a negative criterion on the contents of religious beliefs. That is, demonstrative knowledge, in establishing with certainty what cannot be true, can determine what is *not* a matter of religious belief. But since not all religious beliefs can be established to be true by demonstration, demonstrative knowledge does not suffice to determine what is a matter of religious belief.⁶⁶ In content, religious beliefs can extend beyond the domain of philosophy, but only in relation to it. For if there are no demonstrations against a belief, then it may be held on faith, that is, on a literal understanding of scriptural texts or merely on the basis of tradition. In other words, such a belief is ultimately justified on the basis of prophetic authority, the claim of prophets that they have received a revelation from God recorded in the scriptures or expressed in tradition. But neither the text nor tradition nor prophetic authority is self-justifying. Even prophetic authority, if it is to be of true prophets, must, for Maimonides, be substantiated.⁶⁷

A number of problems of scriptural interpretation that Maimonides handles in the *Guide* substantiate the above interpretation of the relationship between religion and philosophy. On the nature of God, for instance, a literal understanding of scriptural texts leads to the anthropomorphic understanding of God as corporeal. This is an imaginary

⁶⁶ Marvin Fox concludes: "where rational inquiry and demonstration have been pushed to their outer limit, every person is forced to appeal to some other source of truth. Even then reason still continues to exercise an important degree of control, because neither religion nor any other source of truth is acceptable if it forces us to affirm doctrines directly contrary to reason"; Fox, "Limits of Reason," 35.

⁶⁷ See *Guide*, II, 40, pp. 382-85; and the study of Eliezer Goldman, "Rationality and Revelation in Maimonides' Thought," in *Maimonides and Philosophy*, ed. Pines and Yovel, 15-23.

belief about the nature of God. It does, therefore, acknowledge the existence of God and in that respect opposes total disbelief. But the belief that God is corporeal is also literally false, because the denial of that claim, that God cannot be corporeal is, according to Maimonides, a demonstrated truth.⁶⁸ Since the denial of God's corporeality is a true intellectual belief, replaced by the demonstrated claim that God is absolutely simple and incomparable, scriptural texts with an anthropomorphic connotation need to be re-interpreted figuratively in line with this true intellectual belief about God's nature.⁶⁹ Maimonides' critique of the Christian belief in a Trinity runs along similar lines: the assertion that God is three amounts to either a mere use of words without meaning or else to a false claim, because the contrary claim that God is one can be demonstrated to be true.⁷⁰ In either case, philosophy dictates the content of religious beliefs.

The issue of creation versus the eternity of the world presents a different approach. Here Maimonides contends that purported demonstrations for the eternity of the world along Aristotelian lines logically fail. Furthermore, Aristotle did not intend to demonstrate the eternity of the world; his commentators mistakenly took him to do so.⁷¹ Since the eternity of the world is not a matter of demonstration, Maimonides accepts the contrary belief in creation on the basis of scriptures and tradition. He reinforces this belief by showing that it conforms with a number of other central Judaic beliefs, some of which can be demonstrated.⁷² But, significantly for our purpose, he notes that had the eternity of the world been demonstrated, he would reinterpret figuratively those scriptural texts suggesting creation.⁷³ Here, then, is an example of a belief held on faith, on scriptural texts and tradition alone, but only because the opposite belief is not demonstrably true.⁷⁴ A similar line of

⁶⁸ See *Guide*, I, 1, p. 21; 27, p. 58; 30, p. 63; II, 1, pp. 243-52.

⁶⁹ See *Guide*, I, 1, pp. 22-3; 4, pp. 27-28; 35, pp. 79-81.

⁷⁰ See *Guide*, I, 50, p. 111.

⁷¹ See *Guide*, I, 71, p. 180; II, Intro., p. 240; 15, p. 290; 16, pp. 293-94.

⁷² See *Guide*, II, 19, p. 303; 22, p. 320; 23, pp. 321-22; 25, pp. 327-28.

⁷³ See *Guide*, II, 25, pp. 327-28.

⁷⁴ Whether indeed Maimonides holds a belief in creation as he maintains exoterically or whether he holds the contrary belief esoterically is much debated. I suggest here an argument that relies on his epistemology implicit in the *Guide* in favor of Maimonides' overt claim holding a belief in creation. Nevertheless, this overt claim may be significantly nuanced in Maimonides. See, for instance, Arthur Hyman, "Maimonides on Creation and Emanation," in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John F. Wippel (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 1987), 45-61; Warren Zev Harvey, "A Third Approach to Maimonides' Cosmogony-Prophetology Puzzle," in *Maimonides*, ed. Buijs, 71-88.

reasoning is suggested in the case of God's knowledge of particulars. God's knowledge is beyond our grasp and so we cannot demonstrate whether God knows particulars or only universals. But because there is no reason not to admit that God does know particulars, Maimonides again sides with the scriptural texts and Jewish tradition.⁷⁵ In the case of both creation and God's knowledge, however, it is important to stress that Maimonides does not claim understanding of these beliefs. The scope of intellectual beliefs is limited. In that case, religion dictates, albeit imperfectly, the content of philosophy.

In sum, for Maimonides, religious beliefs based on scriptural texts or their rabbinic interpretation are acceptable, only if there is no demonstration of their contrary belief. Similarly, prophets are true prophets, only if there are no demonstrations in the case of theoretical matters, and no prudential considerations in the case of practical matters, that count against their assertions. Since in their content and purpose faith and religion lack adequate justification, they cannot stand without philosophy and reason. And since in their apprehension and understanding of truth, reason and philosophy cannot be complete, they are complemented by religion and faith. In different ways, religion needs philosophy as much as philosophy needs religion. Faith necessarily relies on reason for an adequate justification and reason necessarily relies on faith for a comprehensive understanding.

Conclusion

Maimonides' position on religion and philosophy differs from that of both Averroes and Aquinas. For each of them reason is associated with the demonstrative knowledge of philosophy and faith with the acceptance of religious truths. For Aquinas, however, reason exercises no control over the content of faith; for Maimonides it does, albeit negatively. For Averroes, faith has no independent access to truth; for Maimonides it does, albeit imperfectly.

The difference, I believe, is significant for the very concept of faith and religious belief. As an epistemic activity, faith involves both an act of believing and the content of a belief. The question, then, can be asked whether both are subject to philosophic justification in the sense of some rational demonstration or intellectual understanding. In Aquinas's view, the act of faith is subject to philosophic justification but its content

⁷⁵ See *Guide*, III, 17, pp. 471-74; 18, p. 476; 20, pp. 480-84.

is not. The acceptance of revelation as a source of truth is philosophically justified in terms of establishing the preconditions of faith, namely, the existence of God and the fact of divine communication. But what is thus revealed and believed extends beyond the scope of philosophical understanding. Hence faith extends beyond reason. Claims can be made on behalf of revelation that are contrary to rational considerations. In this sense, reason gives way to faith.

In Averroes' view, to the contrary, faith gives way to reason. For him, the act of faith is not philosophically justified; at best it has some pragmatic justification in that religious beliefs serve a useful purpose. However, the content of faith is fully subject to philosophical justification. Unless what is believed on faith is philosophically intelligible, its truth is questionable. Thus, either faith is replaced by reason or else it remains a dubious alternative to reason.

Maimonides, instead, offers a third alternative, intermediate to both of the above positions. The act of faith is subject to philosophic justification and so is its content—in part.⁷⁶ Prophecy and prophetic authority, the vehicles of revelation, need to be established in order to accept these as a source of truth. But what is thus believed is subject to the further condition that it is not demonstrably false. Only if it is not, does faith extend beyond reason. Hence, neither does reason fully give way to faith nor does faith fully give way to reason. Consequently, for Maimonides religious beliefs are less rational than they are for Averroes and more rational than they are for Aquinas.

The contrast in the respective views of Averroes, Aquinas, and Maimonides on the relationship between religion and philosophy can be put in a different way. In its truth claims, religion, for Averroes, lies within the scope of philosophy; they are coextensive in content, although neither in their purpose nor in their manner of understanding are religion and philosophy the same. Aquinas would agree with Averroes that in their purpose and in their manner of understanding religion and philosophy are different. But he would disagree with Averroes on the content of religion and philosophy. For Aquinas, the truth claims of religion lie beyond the scope of philosophy; some of the truth claims of reli-

⁷⁶ Another position emerges from existential thinking according to which neither the act nor content of faith is subject to rational justification; see, for instance, the concept of faith in Karl Jaspers, *The Perennial Scope of Philosophy*, translated by Ralph Manheim (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1968), 1-8; or the concept of dialogical encounter in Martin Buber as elucidated by Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber and the Eternal* (New York: Human Sciences Press, Inc., 1986), 15-50.

gion, at least, are grasped and justified in a manner that is independent of philosophy. Maimonides would contest the independence of religion from philosophy. Truth claims of religion, in Maimonides' view, can extend beyond the scope of philosophy; however, they can neither be grasped nor justified without appeal to philosophy. Religion, for Maimonides, remains inherently linked to philosophy, even when it transcends the limits of philosophy.

Maimonides' understanding of faith and religious belief, as well as his understanding of the relationship between religion and philosophy, offers equally interesting implications for the contemporary discussion concerning religion and science. Rather than view religion and science as unrelated and irrelevant to each other, a Maimonidean approach would see each as limited and for that reason as complementary to each other. On the one hand, it would caution against a literal understanding of scriptures and an uncritical acceptance of religious authority, both often acknowledged as vehicles of revelation, and, on the other hand, it would caution against an overconfidence in empirical methodology, the epistemological bedrock of science. In so far as religion, for instance, cannot fully justify its purported claims on the basis of revelation alone, be it conveyed through scriptures, tradition or authority, science offers at least a negative criterion for the acceptability of religious claims. And insofar as science cannot adequately deal with issues of meaning and purpose, religion supplements scientific knowledge.⁷⁷ In a historical as well as contemporary setting, a Maimonidean approach to the question of religion and philosophy offers a distinctively nuanced view on the relationship between religion and philosophy and, by implication, on the relationship between religion and science.

⁷⁷ See, for instance, MacKay, *Science and Meaning*; Buijs, "Religion, Science and Philosophy," 27-38; and Luscombe, *Groundwork of Science and Religion*, 222-25.

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